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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

28 May 1987

Pakistan-India: Effect of Pakistani AEW
Aircraft on the Military Balance

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Summary

Pakistan's acquisition of Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft would significantly enhance its military capabilities against India and probably spark an arms race in South Asia of AEW and counter-AEW equipment and weaponry. AEW aircraft would improve Pakistan's use of its limited number of high performance F-16 and Mirage aircraft, significantly increase the air intercept capabilities of Pakistan's aging Chinese fighters, and help integrate Pakistan's ground antiaircraft defenses.

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New Delhi, however, is likely to retain overall air superiority as it acquires additional equipment to counter a Pakistani AEW aircraft. New Delhi also probably will respond to a Pakistani AEW aircraft by accelerating the development of its own AEW program, reconsidering Moscow's offer of the IL-76 Mainstay AWACS aircraft, and acquiring long-range surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles and new interceptor aircraft. Mutual suspicions are likely to be heightened as each sees the other attempting to change the military balance in its favor.

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A Pakistani AEW aircraft, especially if it acquires the E-3A AWACS, would enable Islamabad to substantially offset India's superior numbers of

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, at the request of The Honorable Michael H. Armacost, State Department. Comments and queries should be directed to Chief, South Asia Division [redacted]

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modern high-performance fighter aircraft and to increase the cost to New Delhi of an air war.*

and we expect India's advantage to grow over the next 5 to 10 years. The Pakistanis believe AWACS aircraft would help them overcome New Delhi's numerical superiority in high performance aircraft by improving their surveillance, early warning, and command and control over air assets along the Indian border,

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We believe AEW aircraft will dramatically improve the Pakistani Air Force's capabilities to intercept intruding Indian aircraft during a war. Over the relatively flat Punjab plains and Rajasthan desert--the central half of the Indo-Pakistani border--AEW aircraft would give the Pakistanis the ability to detect at longer ranges Indian aircraft flying at medium to high altitudes and would be particularly useful in filling low-altitude gaps in the current radar network. Early warning of the number and routes of attacking Indian aircraft would allow Islamabad to better direct the use of its advanced F-16 and Mirage fighters and to make significantly better use of the aging Chinese F-6 interceptors. Employing the battlefield management abilities of an AWACS, Pakistani F-16s and Mirages, configured for air defense missions, could concentrate on intercepting and breaking up Indian strike missions well before they reached their targets. AWACS aircraft also could enable the Pakistanis to make more effective use of strike aircraft inside India by enabling them to avoid Indian defensive fighter patrols.

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The ability of the AWACS to tie into an automated ground air defense system being installed in Pakistan would further improve the potency of Pakistan's air defenses. Although the majority of Pakistan's ground defenses are vintage Chinese antiaircraft guns interspersed with a few modern short- and medium-range surface-to-air missiles (Stingers, RBS-70s, and Crotales), the ability of these ground assets to put up an effective defense would be significantly increased if they could be directed by AWACS against specific incoming aircraft or routes of attacking Indian aircraft.

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*We use AEW to refer to all kinds of airborne, early warning aircraft. The key difference between E-2C Hawkeye and AWACS (E-3A Sentry) aircraft is that after an AEW system detects incoming enemy aircraft, it must pass that information on to ground controllers who then order defensive fighters to respond. The AWACS aircraft not only can detect incoming enemy aircraft, but it can order friendly aircraft and antiaircraft weapons to respond immediately to changing battlefield conditions. In this paper, we have assumed that Pakistan would own and man the aircraft.

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Indian Responses

New Delhi has reacted strongly to press reports that the United States has promised to supply Pakistan with AEW aircraft. India's semi-official Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis claims that Pakistani AEW aircraft would completely upset the balance of power and become the most serious security threat India has faced since independence. Many Indian officials and the popular Indian press grossly overestimate the capabilities of a Pakistani AEW aircraft by claiming its radar can cover all of South Asia and detect Indian tanks as they move toward the border.

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New Delhi's options for responding to Pakistan's AEW capabilities include acquiring an AEW system of its own or countering Pakistan's AEW aircraft with new air defense weapons. The Indians are likely to pursue both avenues, but we believe they will emphasize the quicker solution of acquiring Soviet surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles. Indian press reports suggest the Indians are interested in Soviet SA-5 and, perhaps, SA-10 surface-to-air missiles. The Indians believe--and we agree--that these missiles would reduce the effectiveness of Pakistani AEW aircraft by discouraging them from flying close to the border. We believe the Indians are also interested in acquiring Soviet AA-10 medium-range (possibly as much as 90 km) and improved AA-7 missiles (45 km) air-to-air missiles to be carried on India's Soviet fighter aircraft. Less likely, the Indians may approach the Soviets for additional MiG-25 or even MiG-31 long-range interceptors that could fly at high altitudes through Pakistani airspace to attack a Pakistani AEW aircraft.

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New Delhi is pursuing an indigenous AWACS program for the 1990s and likely will accelerate this program and seek interim systems in response to any newly acquired Pakistani AEW aircraft.

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also is interested in purchasing a US early warning system based on tethered balloons fitted with radars and sensors. They are not as effective as AEW aircraft, but can serve as a credible stop-gap measure. Although the Indians rejected the Soviet IL-76 Mainstay AWACS earlier this year, probably because it did not fit India's requirements, New Delhi may reconsider this position now that Pakistan may acquire AEW aircraft.

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Effect on the Military Balance

In our judgment, Pakistan's acquisition of a US AEW aircraft would greatly enhance Islamabad's capabilities against India but we believe India would retain overall air superiority. India, would still have at least a 4

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to 1 advantage in advanced fighter aircraft and likely would have acquired weapons to reduce the effectiveness of Pakistan's AEW aircraft. Moreover, India probably would have acquired AEW aircraft of its own that would enhance the effectiveness of Indian fighter aircraft. [REDACTED]

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We believe the Indian Air Force could disrupt the operations of Pakistani AEW aircraft in a war by modeling its tactics along the lines of Soviet war plans to disrupt NATO AWACS aircraft over Europe. The Indian attacks, even if unsuccessful in shooting down AEW aircraft, could force the Pakistani pilots to take defensive measures--flying west away from the Indian border, diving to lower altitudes, or turning off radars--that would effectively remove them from the air battle at critical times. [REDACTED]

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The costs of such a strategy for the Indian Air Force would be high, in our judgment. A determined defense of an AEW aircraft by Pakistani F-16s and other air defense fighters would require the Indians to commit most of their advanced fighters to attack the AEW aircraft. This would reduce the number of combat aircraft available for other important missions, including attacks on Pakistan's strategic facilities, troop concentrations, and transportation network. [REDACTED]

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We believe that Pakistan's acquisition of AEW aircraft and India's reactive arms purchases will fuel an air defense arms race. India's acquisition of Soviet defense systems to counter the AEW likely will spur Pakistan into requesting additional US weaponry. If, for example, India decides to rely on new long-range missiles and electronic warfare equipment to counter Pakistani AEW aircraft, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We believe that New Delhi's purchase of advanced Soviet fighters and missiles would spur Islamabad to opt to purchase as many as 150 no-frills air defense F-16 fighters from the United States, something the Pakistanis are already considering. [REDACTED]

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US supply of AEW aircraft to Pakistan will increase, in our judgment, the premium both sides place on preemptive airstrikes. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] In our judgment, the Indians, who already assume the necessity of preemptive attacks against Pakistani air bases, would be even more tempted to strike Pakistan in times of crisis, if only to eliminate the Pakistani AEW aircraft on the ground. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: Pakistan-India: Effect of Pakistani AEW Aircraft
on the Military Balance. [REDACTED]

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EXTERNAL

- 1 - The Honorable Michael H. Armacost (State)
- 1 - Lt. Colonel Joseph Clare (US Arms & Disarm Agency)
- 1 - Sherin Tahir Khali (NSC)
- 1 - Robert Peck (State)
- 1 - Herbert Hagerty (State)
- 1 - William Schneider (State)
- 1 - Donald Camp (State)
- 1 - Dr. Stephen Cohen (State)
- 1 - H. Allen Holmes (State)
- 1 - Ron Lorton (State)
- 1 - Grant Smith (State)
- 1 - Dean McKalip (DSAA)
- 1 - Sandra Charles (DoD)
- 1 - David Hatcher (DoD)
- 1 - Major W. Andrew Ritezel (DoD)
- 1 - Marc Palevitz (DoD)
- 1 - Dr. Darnell Whitt (DoD)
- 1 - Normal Wulf (ACDA)
- 1 - Blair Murray (PM/SAS)
- 1 - Blad Lehobitch (PM/DAS)
- 1 - Col. John Bircher (NEA/RA)
- 1 - Cmd. Steve Miller (OJCS-J5)

INTERNAL

- 1 - DDI
- 1 - ADDI
- 1 - DIR/DCI/DDCI Exec Staff
- 1 - NIO/NESA
- 1 - D/NESA
- 1 - DD/NESA
- 1 - C/PPS/NESA
- 2 - NESA/PPS
- 1 - C/PES
- 6 - CPAS/IMB/CB
- 1 - PDB Staff
- 1 - NID Staff
- 1 - C/DO/NE

[REDACTED]
1 - SOVA/TWA/A
1 - OSWR/ADB [REDACTED]

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- 1 - C/NESA/PG
- 1 - C/NESA/IA
- 1 - C/NESA/AI
- 1 - C/NESA/SO
- 1 - DC/NESA/SO
- 1 - C/NESA/SO/P
- 1 - C/NESA/SO/A
- 1 - C/NESA/SO/S

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